

**North Chicago, IL** - U.S. Rep. Mark Kirk joined Illinois veterans, Veterans Affairs and Navy officials at a dedication ceremony Monday officially opening the new \$13 million joint Navy/VA Emergency Room and surgical facilities at the North Chicago Veterans Administration Medical Center.

The opening of four new operating rooms and an expanded ER – featuring 14 new exam rooms - completes the second phase of integration between the VA and Naval Hospital Great Lakes. The integration marks a milestone for federal healthcare with this first-time shared services relationship between the VA and Department of Defense.

“We are proud to be home to the first partnership of this type between the VA and the Navy,” said Congressman Kirk. “The integration of these two facilities ensures the survival of veterans’ health care here in Northern Illinois. Our plan also upgrades health care for the families of men and women wearing the uniform of the United States Navy.”

In October of 2003, Kirk won approval for the first stage of the integration, moving the Navy’s mental health unit into the North Chicago VA. This blocked prior administration VA plans to close the veteran’s hospital. Last October, Kirk announced the site for the new joint VA/Navy hospital, a \$130 million Navy construction project to include a new joint hospital co-located with the VA. Site selection is complete and preliminary construction on the new hospital will begin next year.

The integration means VA & Navy doctors will work together to provide top quality care to veterans, sailors and their families. In addition, for the first time in a VA facility, pediatric care is being provided for Navy family members.

“By sharing health care services, we will provide state-of-the-art medical care for both veterans and sailors,” said Congressman Kirk. “We are now able to provide pediatric care for the first time by the Veterans Administration and a \$1.3 million Women’s Health Clinic will be opened when our new VA/Navy hospital is built. With over 55,000 veterans expected to be living in Lake County by 2010, the integration of our Navy and VA hospitals offers better health care for our growing veterans’ community.”

Kirk was instrumental in saving the North Chicago VA from two attempts to close the hospital in 1999 and 2000. With Navy Great Lakes and the North Chicago VA hospitals less than a mile apart, Kirk brought the Secretaries of Defense and Veterans Affairs together on a plan to combine services of the two hospitals, creating a synergy that would improve health care for both veterans and sailors.

Joining Kirk at today's celebration were **Gordon H. Mansfield**, Deputy Secretary of Veterans Affairs, **Dr. Stephen L. Jones**, Principal Deputy Asst. Secretary of Defense for Health Affairs, **Rear Admiral Gary Jones**, Commander Naval Service Training Command & Navy Region Midwest, **Patrick Sullivan**, Director, North Chicago Veterans Administration Medical Center, **Captain Michael Anderson**, Commanding Officer, Naval Hospital Great Lakes, North Chicago, **Mayor Leon Rockingham**, and **Johnnie Allen**, Superintendent of the Veterans' Assistance Commission of Lake County.

Contact: Matt Towson  
847-940-0202  
cell: 773-454-5396